



Your guide to government

How to get informed and involved

Dear Friends and Neighbors,

A few months ago, I sent out a Pre-Session Survey asking your opinions on a variety of important issues that affect you and your families: strong schools, secure families, good jobs, healthy environment, and responsive government. Your response was overwhelming and I continue to receive your completed surveys! Thank you for taking the time to share your views with me so that I can effectively represent the interests of our 37th District.

Your interest in participating in the survey as well as the thoughtful remarks you provided prompts me to offer this Guide to Government. I hope you will find this brief guide helpful when you want to obtain information or become more actively involved in the legislative process.

The hallmark of a thriving democracy is an informed and involved citizenry. You've demonstrated that democracy is flourishing throughout our 37th District.

As always, please feel free to contact my office if you have any questions or comments. I look forward to hearing from you.

Sincerely,

SHARON TOMIKO SANTOS
State Representative
37th District



Courtesy of **Rep. Sharon Tomiko Santos**

37th Legislative District

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The Legislature

In 1889, the people of the Territory of Washington adopted a state constitution that affirmed “all political power is inherent in the people, and governments derive their just powers from the consent of the governed.” The Constitution created a bicameral citizen legislature consisting of a Senate (with 49 members currently) and a House of Representatives (with 98 members currently). The citizen legislature is unique because our elected legislators are not intended to serve as year-round lawmakers. Rather, members of the Washington State Legislature are ordinary people who continue to live and work in the communities they are elected to represent.



Making new laws

Here's how a bill that originates in the House of Representatives becomes law:

The Idea: When a constituent or lawmaker has an idea for a good law, a bill is written and introduced in the House.

Committee: The bill is sent (“referred”) to a committee that will study it and often hold public hearings to gather input. The committee can pass the bill, reject it, or take no action at all.

First Reading: If the bill passes out of committee, it is officially read on the House floor and referred to the House Rules Committee, which decides whether the bill should be heard by all 98 members on the House floor.

Second Reading: If the House Rules Committee sends the bill back to the full House for consideration (second reading), the bill can be debated and amended.

Third Reading: Usually, bills that are amended and passed are scheduled for another round on the floor (third reading) so members can consider the changes. If a majority of members (at least 50) vote “yes,” the bill goes to the Senate.

Senate: The Senate refers the bill to a Senate committee and the same process occurs — the bill must pass out of committee, then the full Senate votes on it.

Governor: If the Senate passes the same House bill without any amendments, it is sent to the governor, who can sign it, veto it, or veto portions of it.

House-Senate difference: If the Senate passes the bill with any additional amendments, it is sent back to the House, which can accept the Senate’s changes or request the Senate to leave the bill unchanged.

Conference committee: Differences between House and Senate versions of a bill may also be negotiated in a conference committee of selected House and Senate members. If the conferees agree on a compromise bill, the identical bill must pass in both the House and Senate before it is sent to the governor.

How to get informed and involved

Getting informed

Finding information about an issue or bill may be easier than you think. The Washington State Legislature is one of the most accessible in the nation, and you're a phone call or web site away from getting the information you need.

In addition to calling my office directly (360-786-7944), you can use the Legislature's web page, watch TVW's coverage of the Legislature or call the Bill Room.

The Bill Room (360-786-7573) — Through the bill room, you can learn the status of any piece of legislation, find out about the daily meeting schedule, or get a copy of a bill.

Legislature's home page (www.leg.wa.gov) — This web page is the most comprehensive place to learn about an issue in the legislature. You can track the progress of any bill, see committee schedules, find out about any of the members of the House and Senate, or look up sections of state law.

Access Washington (access.wa.gov) — This is the state's portal to all government links: the Legislature, the Governor and all state agencies, as well as city and county government. You'll find this an excellent place to begin your search.

TVW (www.tvw.org) — TVW (TV-Washington) televises important floor debates in the House or Senate, key committee hearings, and other important events. TVW is available in most areas as a cable channel, so check with your provider for your local channel number. If you don't have TVW on cable in your area, you can access TVW's library of streaming video and audio files through their web site.

Getting involved

When to get involved

There are three key stages when you can affect legislation.

1. The idea phase — Some of the best legislation starts out as an idea from average people who have experienced a problem first-hand and have identified a common-sense solution.

2. In committee — Anyone can sign up to testify before a committee in favor or against a bill. Or, if you have a particularly compelling story to tell about the issue but can't attend the hearing, you can send your comments to your lawmaker and request that your comments be included in the record.

3. Before the final vote — Thousands of bills are proposed each session, but only a fraction will make it to the floor for a vote, and even fewer are passed into law. Every lawmaker pays close attention to the letters, phone calls and e-mails from constituents before casting a vote on the floor.

Getting in Touch

- Hotline: 800-562-6000
- Hearing-Impaired Hotline: 800-635-9993
- Send mail to any representative: Representative (Name), PO Box 40600, Olympia, WA 98504-0600
- Send mail to any senator: Senator (Name), PO Box 40482, Olympia, WA 98504-0482
- E-mail any representative or senator: first eight letters of their last name, underscore, first two letters of their first name, then @leg.wa.gov — example: lastname_fi@leg.wa.gov

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High school page program

Since 1891, youth from across Washington state have served as legislative pages for the House and Senate. This one-week program offers high school students a great chance to learn about democracy first-hand.

The already excellent page program is being strengthened during the 2000 session with the addition of teachers dedicated to educating pages when they are not performing legislative duties.

Youth ages 14 to 16 are eligible for the program. To find out more information, visit www.leg.wa.gov/house/hadm/pageprog.htm or call the Page Supervisor at 360-786-7573.




College internships

Student interns spend their winter quarter or spring semester in Olympia working in the House or Senate, researching legislation, taking part in seminars and participating in mock debates and budget writing.

Juniors and seniors are eligible for the program, which must be taken for undergraduate credit. Interns accepted into the program receive \$1,000 per month but must secure their own housing, food and transportation in Olympia.

For more information, visit www.leg.wa.gov/common/interns/interns.htm or call the House intern coordinator (360-786-7993) or Senate intern coordinator (360-786-7451).

Town hall meeting – 11 a.m. Saturday, Feb. 19
Garfield Community Center Multi-Purpose Room, 2323 East Cherry Street

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Rep. Sharon Tomiko Santos

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